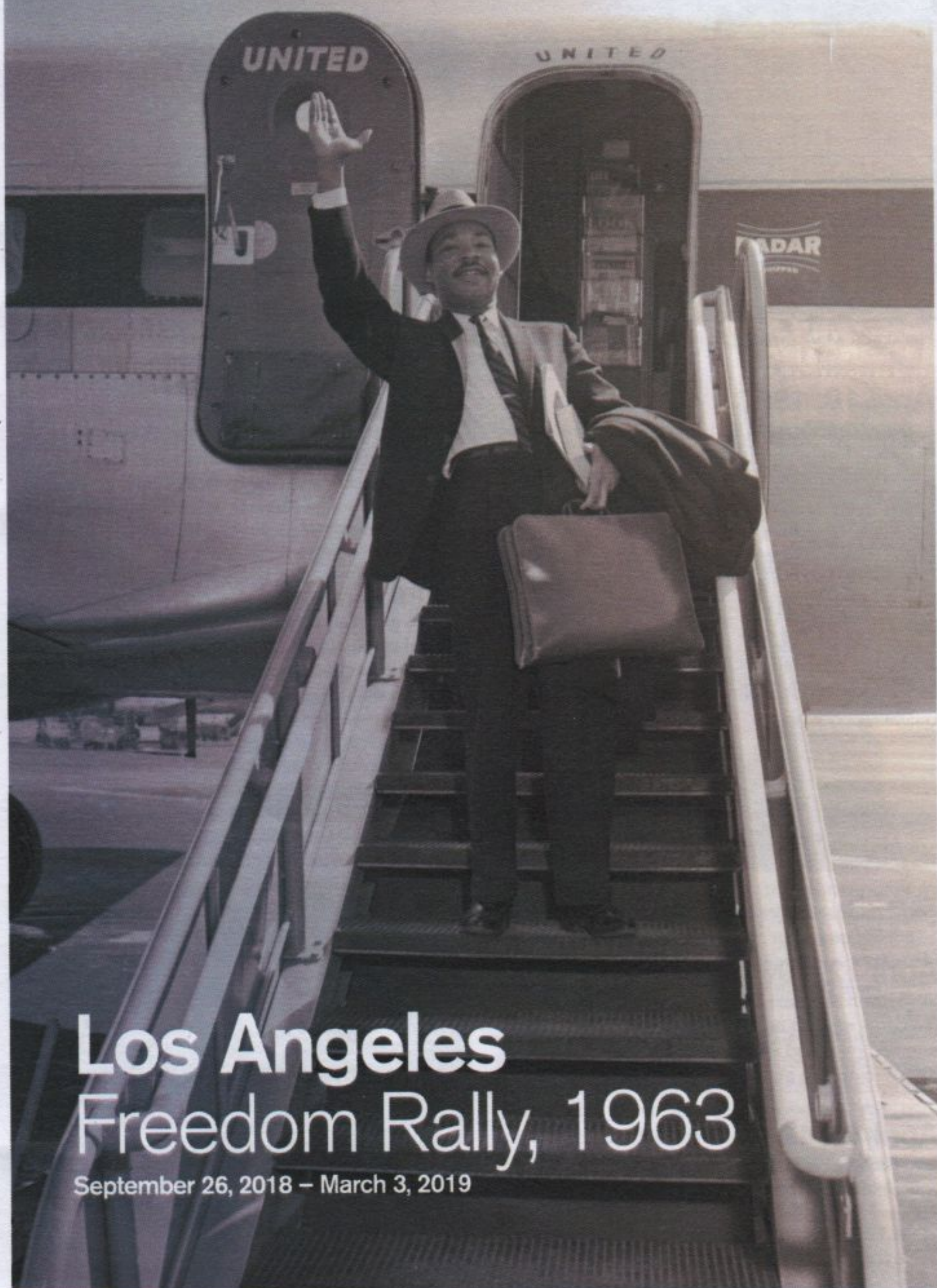


California African American Museum



Los Angeles Freedom Rally, 1963

September 26, 2018 – March 3, 2019

Los Angeles

Freedom Rally, 1963

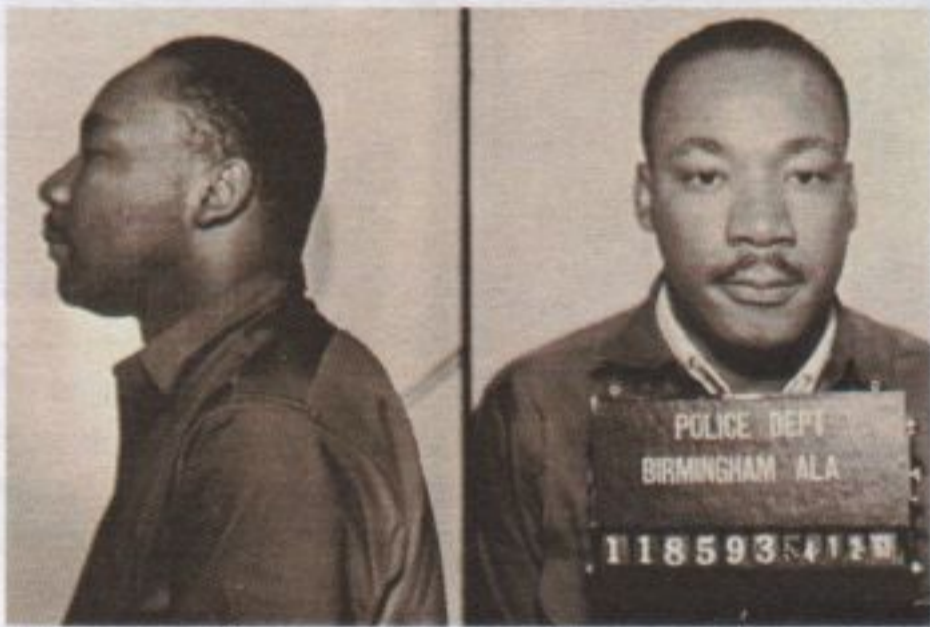
Selected timeline

April 2, 1963

A desegregation campaign was launched with a series of mass meetings, direct actions, lunch counter sit-ins, marches on Birmingham's City Hall, and a boycott of downtown merchants. King spoke to black citizens about the philosophy of nonviolence and its methods, and he extended appeals for volunteers at the end of the mass meetings. With the number of volunteers increasing daily, actions soon expanded to kneel-ins at churches, sit-ins at the library, and a march on the county building to register voters. Hundreds were arrested.

April 10, 1963

Eugene "Bull" Connor, Birmingham's Commissioner of Public Safety, obtained an injunction barring the protests and subsequently raised bail bond for those arrested from \$200 to \$1,500 (the equivalent of \$2,000 to \$10,000 in 2018).



Birmingham Alabama Police Department, Mugshot of Martin Luther King Jr., April 12, 1963. Courtesy NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune

April 12, 1963

With Ralph Abernathy, King was among 50 Birmingham residents ranging in age from 15 to 81 who were arrested on Good Friday, April 12, 1963. It was King's thirteenth arrest.

April 15, 1963

Tom Bradley, a former police officer turned lawyer, was elected as the first African American on the Los Angeles City Council.

April 16, 1963

King penned the "Letter from Birmingham Jail" on the margins of the *Birmingham News*, in reaction to a statement published in that newspaper by eight white Birmingham clergymen condemning the protests.

April 19, 1963

In the April 19 issue of *Time* magazine, under the headline "Poorly Timed Protest," the magazine cast King as an outsider who did not consult the city's local activists and leaders before making demands that set Birmingham's progress back and drew Bull Connor's ire. "Last week Connor and Police Chief Jamie Moore got an injunction against all demonstrations from a state court," the magazine reported. "King announced that he would ignore it, led some 1,000 Negroes toward the business district. Both King and one of his top aides, the Rev. Ralph D. Abernathy, were promptly thrown into jail."

April 20, 1963

King's arrest attracted national attention, including that of corporate officers of retail chains with stores in downtown Birmingham. After King's arrest, the chains' profits began to erode. National business owners pressed the Kennedy administration to intervene. King was released on April 20, 1963.

May 2–9, 1963

The Children's Crusade began on May 2, when more than 1,000 African American students attempted to march into downtown Birmingham and hundreds were arrested. When hundreds more gathered the following day, Bull Connor directed local police and fire departments to use force to halt the demonstrations.

May 10, 1963

Fred Shuttlesworth and King told reporters that they had an agreement from the City of Birmingham to desegregate lunch counters, restrooms, drinking fountains, and fitting rooms within 90 days, and to hire blacks in stores as salesmen and clerks. Those in jail would be released on bond or their own recognizance. Urged by President John F. Kennedy, the United Auto Workers, National Maritime Union, United Steelworkers Union, and the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) raised



Opening Day, Wrigley Field, 1925. Courtesy the Security Pacific National Bank Collection, Los Angeles Public Library

\$237,000 in bail money (equal to \$1,890,000 in 2018) to free the demonstrators. Bull Connor and the outgoing mayor condemned the resolution.

May 12, 1963

Two days after King and Shuttlesworth announced the settlement in Birmingham, Medgar Evers, field secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in Jackson, Mississippi, demanded a biracial committee to address concerns there.

May 16, 1963

As of May 16, 1963, members of the Rally for Freedom Committee were still attempting to bring King and comedian Dick Gregory to the rally, as well as the woman pictured in local newspapers on the ground with three policemen assaulting her.



Freedom Rally, Wrigley Field, Los Angeles, May 26, 1963. Courtesy the Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University



Harry Adams, Freedom Rally, Wrigley Field, Los Angeles, May 26, 1963. Courtesy the Harry Adams Collection

May 26, 1963

King was the keynote speaker at Wrigley Field, home of the original Los Angeles Angels, for a rally before 30,000 attendees that included movie stars Dorothy Dandridge, Rita Moreno, Paul Newman, Sammy Davis Jr., Dick Gregory, and others. Following the rally, an orderly and interracial group of marchers, sponsored by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), carried posters and walked from the city's east side toward downtown.

Later that evening, King attended a fundraiser at Burt Lancaster's home with 250 guests, including Marlon Brando. "Birmingham or Los Angeles, the cry is always the same," King told the crowd. "We want to be free." He continued: "You can help us in Birmingham by getting rid of segregation in Los Angeles." Overall, the Freedom Rally generated \$75,000: \$35,000 at the rally, \$20,000 at Burt Lancaster's home, and \$20,000 pledged by Sammy Davis Jr (equal to over \$500,000 in 2018).

June 1963

Throughout the month, the Jim Crow era signs regulating segregated public places in Birmingham were taken down.

June 11, 1963

Racial violence and protests pressured President Kennedy to introduce a civil rights bill. In a televised address on June 11, 1963, Kennedy proposed legislation to ban racial discrimination in public accommodations, provide protections to black voters, and end segregated education. In his speech, Kennedy specifically explained why he sent the National Guard to Tuscaloosa to allow the admittance of two African American students into the University of Alabama.

June 12, 1963

Medgar Evers was fatally shot outside his home. He had been organizing demonstrations similar to those in Birmingham to pressure Jackson's city government to desegregate.

July 2, 1963

Leaders representing six national civil rights organizations met at the Roosevelt Hotel in New York on July 2, 1963, to announce a march demanding jobs and freedom. The group appointed A. Philip Randolph (president of the Negro American Labor Council) as march director and activist Bayard Rustin as his principal deputy. In just eight weeks, they proposed to hold the largest demonstration in American history. These leaders included Randolph; John R. Lewis, Director, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC); Whitney Young, Executive Director, National Urban League (NUL); James L. Farmer Jr., National Director, Congress of Racial Equality (CORE); Roy Wilkins, Executive Secretary, NAACP; and Martin Luther King Jr., President, Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

August 28, 1963

In the shadow of the Lincoln Monument, King gave his famous "I Have a Dream" speech during the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. He announced to the crowd, "1963 is not an end, but a beginning." For legal segregation, it would turn out to be the beginning of the end.



Smithsonian Affiliate

The California African American Museum is a state-supported agency and a Smithsonian Affiliate.

CAAM in Exposition Park



Martin Luther King Jr. waves to March on Washington supporters, August 28, 1963. Courtesy Getty Images

September 15, 1963

Ku Klux Klan members bombed Birmingham's 16th Street Baptist Church, killing four young girls. King delivered the eulogy at the joint funeral of three of the victims on September 18, preaching that the girls were "the martyred heroines of a holy crusade for freedom and human dignity."

November 22, 1963

In the months after the March on Washington, ongoing demonstrations and violence continued to pressure political leaders to act. Following President Kennedy's assassination on November 22, 1963, President Lyndon B. Johnson broke through the legislative stalemate in Congress.

December 6, 1963

King returned to Los Angeles in December 1963 for Stars For Freedom, a star-studded event that featured Sammy Davis Jr., Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, and Count Basie, among others.

July 2, 1964

The Civil Rights Act of 1964, which banned discrimination in employment and public places, was signed into law by President Johnson.

This exhibition is curated by Tyree Boyd-Pates, History Curator and Program Manager, and Taylor Bythewood-Porter, Assistant History Curator.

Special acknowledgment to Friendship Baptist Church of Pasadena; historian and archivist Keith Rice of the Tom & Ethel Bradley Center, California State University, Northridge; Diane Lara and the family of Harry Adams; and to the exhibition lenders.

Cover: Harry Adams, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at airport, Los Angeles, February 23, 1968. Courtesy the Harry Adams Collection